

IMPROVING MOBILE COVERAGE FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Plans to improve mobile coverage across Cambridgeshire are being backed by the County Council to help businesses grow, people stay in touch and reduce rural isolation. Mobile coverage is poor or non-existent in some parts of Cambridgeshire, particularly in rural areas and along some major road and rail routes.

Cambridgeshire County Council wants to see the mobile voice and data infrastructure improved. This will complement the roll-out of better broadband being delivered through the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme. Improving mobile coverage will help to meet the programme's aims to strengthen the local economy. It will help bolster business growth, support people who are vulnerable or isolated and make it easier to access public services.

The Connecting Cambridgeshire programme team is working with Government and will be engaging with the telecommunications industry to develop opportunities to improve mobile coverage for Cambridgeshire.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "We recognise that good mobile communications are essential to the growth of the economy in a digital world where there are more mobile phones than there are people. Using a mobile phone is part of everyday life for the majority of people and can be a life saver in certain circumstances.

"It is appalling that in the 21st Century there are still 'not spots' with no coverage at all in some of our rural areas and commuters are unable to get a consistent signal on the London to Cambridge line. The Connecting Cambridgeshire project will not only be delivering better broadband but also working with the Government to improve mobile coverage to help keep our businesses and rural communities connected."

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HIGHWAY HEROES HIT THE HUNDRED MARK

Cambridgeshire County Council's gritting teams have for the first time carried over a 100 runs during a single winter season and they look set to be kept busy as the cold weather continues. A fleet of 39 specialist gritters - four of them newly acquired for this season - and their team of around 100 highly trained drivers - are on call 24/7 ready to hit the road loaded with some of the 10,000 plus tonnes of salt which is stockpiled at depots around the county.

Gritting runs are triggered automatically by sophisticated weather monitoring equipment which alerts Highways chiefs when temperatures are expected to fall below freezing - on some occasions the fleet will carry out as many as three runs within a 24 hour period when weather conditions and temperatures are particularly bad. In addition specialist brine spraying equipment mounted on two four-wheel drive quad bikes will again be available to treat harder to reach foot and cycle paths in Cambridge and backpack sprayers will be used to 'spot' treat other areas as necessary, including 11 foot and cycle bridges in Cambridge.

Treatment runs cover a network of primary routes across Cambridgeshire designed to keep commuter and passenger transport traffic flowing with secondary routes covered when resources allow.

Salt bins, which are kept stocked by the County Council, are also available to local parishes and the county council works in partnership with the district councils to try to ensure maximum treatment of winter-weather affected areas.

For safe winter driving advice, go to:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Usingmotorwaysandroads/Breakdownsdrivingconditions/DG_185021

CAMBRIDGE SECURES £1.2M FOR CYCLING SAFETY SCHEMES

The Department for Transport (DfT) has given Cambridgeshire County Council nearly £1.2million to improve safety for cyclists at key junctions around Cambridge. The Council has been working with local cycling and transport groups to find out where improvements were most needed. As a result, funding was agreed for three key junctions in the city.

A total of £500,000 has been allocated to install toucan crossings at the A14/B1049 Histon interchange and the A14/B1047 Horningsea interchange, as well as improving cycle lane approaches at the junctions of Gilbert Road and Histon Road, and Gilbert Road and Milton Road. A further £450,000 is earmarked for the junction of Hills Road and Regent Street in Cambridge, adding new cycle lanes on Hills Road to enable cyclists to safely reach the front of the queue. The existing central reservation will be removed, traffic lights will be upgraded and the entire junction resurfaced.

In addition, £240,000 will be spent on improving the junction of Perne Road and Radegund Road. This will improve safety for children cycling and walking to St Bede's School and Coleridge Community College.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "I would like to thank Sustrans, Cambridge Cyclists' Tourists Club (CTC) and Cambridge Cycling Campaign for working with us on the bid. I am delighted that Britain's cycling capital, Cambridge, received funding, and safety improvements can be made to encourage even more people to cycle. We are working hard to improve facilities for cyclists. Cycling makes for a healthy, active, independent population and reduces traffic congestion."

Cambridgeshire County Council has organised a number of events this spring to encourage more people to get on their bikes. More information about these and cycling in Cambridgeshire is available on: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cycling

REFURBISHMENT IS JUST THE TICKET FOR DRUMMER STREET BUS STATION

Cambridge's Drummer Street bus station is about to get an £80,000 makeover thanks to Cambridgeshire County Council. Work started on March 22 and includes cleaning the canopy and street furniture and complete repainting of the steel structure - the first time this type of work has been carried out since the bus station was built in the late 1980s.

Contractors will work overnight from Monday to Saturday after the last busses leave the station and all day on Sunday when the terminus will be closed to buses - bus stops will be moved to new locations nearby. The work is expected to take around four weeks. The steelwork and glazing will be jet washed and the steel girders painted with a protective coating to bring them back to their original colour. Other fixtures and fittings will also be cleaned and re-painted as necessary.

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FAKE TAKEAWAY HELPS THE HOMELESS

Fake designer clothing seized by Cambridgeshire Trading Standards officers has been donated to homeless people in the county. Thousands of pieces of clothing, fashion and music items worth around £10,000, seized in raids across Cambridgeshire, have been donated to Wintercomfort thanks to a linkup between Trading Standards and the His Church Charity.

The items, which had they been genuine would have been worth in the region of £50,000, were seized in raids on fraudulent traders operating in Cambridgeshire. The seized items will be given to the His Church Charity where the clothing will be re-branded with the charity's logo before being handed over to good causes. The latest beneficiary was Wintercomfort which supports homeless people or those who are in danger of becoming homeless.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "It is great that these seized items can go to good use rather than being destroyed. This is a fantastic partnership between the Council and His Church charity which means everyone wins."

In the past items seized by Trading Standards were either destroyed or sent to landfill for disposal.

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ROGUE SALESMEN RING ALARM BELLS FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE RESIDENTS

Cambridgeshire Trading Standards are warning residents to beware of trickster alarm sellers after a number of complaints about their activities. In each case underhand tactics have been used to persuade victims to agree to the supply and installation of a burglar alarm at their home. Victims are often cold called with an offer of special rates or even a free alarm as an installer is in the area.

Once the salesman has been allowed in to a home they then induce the occupier into agreeing to a contract by making further false and misleading claims - for instance that they can have a maintenance contract at half price if agreed on the day.

Some victims have also been told that they have already verbally agreed the contract so cannot cancel it and unauthorised deposits may be taken from a credit or debit card.

Another tactic is that the alarm is delivered or fitted the same day, in an attempt to dupe the consumer into believing they cannot cancel the contract. In fact by law consumer have seven days to cancel a contract made in their own home where the goods or services are worth £35 or more.

Advice from Trading Standards Offices is never to buy from or sign an agreement with cold callers without obtaining quotes from other suppliers and taking advice from family and friends who have bought similar goods or services.

Anyone who thinks they may have been subject to inappropriate or unlawful sales tactics can call Citizens Advice Consumer service on 08454 040506 or for business advice and support contact 0345 0455206.

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GOVERNMENT BACKS IMMIGRATION CHANGES IN CAMBRIDGE CITY DEAL BID

Changes to immigration rules put forward as part of the Greater Cambridge City Deal Bid have been included in Government proposals to help businesses and retain high skilled international students. The architects of the City Deal Bid have welcomed the news that Government will be making changes to rules which will encourage the brightest and best global talent to come to the UK to study, work, invest and set up business.

From April the UK Border Agency will expand the Graduate Entrepreneur scheme to allow up to 1,000 international MBA graduates from British universities to stay in the UK for a year after graduating. These graduates will be able to develop their own business idea, or work in a start-up, after which they will have the option to stay on in the UK as a skilled worker or entrepreneur.

Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, University of Cambridge and the Local Enterprise Partnership put the bid together. They wanted to see changes to the immigration system to avoid unintended negative impacts on the high-tech businesses in and around Cambridge.

If the changes had not been made students from local universities would be prevented from building world class businesses locally using the skills they had gained in Cambridge. Local high-tech industry relies on the best brains in the world being able to stay, study and set up businesses in Cambridgeshire.

Currently negotiations are continuing to secure the Greater Cambridge City Deal which would bring more powers and finance for local use to support ongoing economic growth. Local partners believe the arguments put forward in the City Deal bid were critical in securing this welcome change to the immigration rules.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "All partners involved in the City Deal bid recognised that the current system was harming our unique economic system. Greater Cambridge competes on the world stage with City regions like Greater Boston, Bangalore and Silicon Valley. We need to keep the best brains in the world within our local economy so we can continue to be world beaters. That is why we put such emphasis on immigration issues within our City Deal bid and were able to convince ministers to make the changes recently announced. This is an early win for the City Deal process and shows what can be done when local public authorities work with business and academia to address barriers to growth."

Cllr Ray Manning, Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council, said: "The business and science parks around the city are already a leading force on a regional, national and internal stage and we must keep the brightest talents in the area to continue to innovate. All parties involved in this bid have worked hard to make ministers realise the importance of immigration and how the City Deal and new powers can help the area and our businesses grow."

STOP SMOKING SERVICES NOW AT CENTRAL LIBRARY

Camquit, Cambridgeshire's local stop smoking service now has a new clinic in Central Library every Monday from 11.30am to 2.30pm. Free, weekly one to one support and medicines to help smokers wanting to quit and manage their cravings will be available at the clinic. Research shows that smokers are four times more likely to successfully quit if they get support. There will also be free carbon monoxide checks and stop smoking plans - tailored to individuals. For more information visit Camquit.nhs.uk or call 0800 018 4304

COUNCIL WELCOMES A14 IMPROVEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

A multi-million scheme to improve the notoriously congested section of the A14 between Girton and Histon junctions of the A14 has been welcomed by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The Highways Agency has announced today that a scheme will be completed next year to widen the A14 to three lanes both east and west bound between the junctions. It is part of a wider announcement by the Government to remove pinch points and bottlenecks on UK roads.

The improvements will support the first phase of the development of the new town at Northstowe.

Cambridgeshire County Council, with partners, has been talking to the Highways Agency on possible schemes to improve this busy section of the A14 which is used by thousands of vehicles a year. The announcement is part of the short term and long term measures proposed for the route.

It fits in with the more comprehensive improvements along the route from Milton to Ellington designed to boost safety and the economy as well as reduce congestion.

The scheme will see a new third lane run from the Histon interchange westbound and join directly onto the M11 slip-road. Eastbound a new lane will run directly from the A14/M11 interchange and link to the Histon interchange. This will help reduce congestion which can lead to long queues at peak times.

The Highways Agency says this scheme will be linked to the tranche two scheme that is being undertaken in the westbound direction and supports the Northstowe Phase One development. This has the potential to create 582 jobs and 1,480 new homes by 2020. It also supports the development of the gateways of Felixstowe Port and Harwich Port. It also consistent with the outputs from the A14 Challenge study, providing early improvements consistent with the proposed A14 major improvement scheme announced by the Transport Secretary on 18 July 2012. The Highways Agency says that the Histon to Girton scheme will cost £3.06 million and will start and be completed in 2014.

Alex Plant, Transport Director at Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "This is very welcome news and follows the close working between the Council and the Department for Transport and the Highways Agency. This section of the A14 and its junctions are in desperate need of improvement. Today's announcements are part of the plans to put in place some short-term measures to alleviate some of the most pressing problems on the A14. However, the longer-term plans for enhancements to the A14, along with supporting rail and public transport improvements remain critical if we are to reduce congestion, improve safety and support growth. Cambridgeshire County Council, with its partners, will continue to work with Government to accelerate the longer term solution for this major transport corridor which is vital for the local, regional and wider UK economy."

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REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS 8th APRIL